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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 AMMAN 004737

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FOR NEA/ELA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [JO](#)
SUBJECT: JORDAN'S OLD NEW PARLIAMENT

REF: A. AMMAN 4547
[B](#). AMMAN 4430
[C](#). AMMAN 4559
[D](#). AMMAN 4320

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: As Jordan's new parliament convenes, early indications are that experienced members will at least initially guide the large numbers of newcomers. Five members will return as key players in the new parliament, and the race for speaker is not quite a done deal, but previous speaker Abdulhadi Al-Majali is heavily favored. In the absence of strong political parties or leaders who can consistently rally cohesive blocs of parliamentarians, alliances are likely to shift frequently within the new legislature. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) As Jordan's fifteenth parliamentary session opens on December 2, there are few indications from the recently-completed election season that hint at the character of the new body. The parliament is dominated by newcomers. Twenty-nine members from the fourteenth parliament were re-elected. They are joined by nine members of previous parliaments who have resurfaced, and seventy-two first-time members. The parliament is on average younger and there are more women in the new parliament (seven total) than in the last (six). In the near term, more experienced members of the body are expected to dominate the proceedings - they have the prestige, political will, and in many cases tribal clout to bring together the disparate interests in Jordan's lower house. Yet if previous parliaments are any indication, group loyalty will be fleeting and based more on individual issues rather than a cohesive interest group or bloc. Yet there are members of the new parliament who aspire to bring elements of the members
hip together, either in the form of an informal caucus or a political party.

The Speakership

[1](#)3. (C) The speaker of Jordan's parliament is elected annually. Parliament's first order of business when it convenes on December 2 will be to elect a speaker in a closed-door, secret vote. While it is expected that long-time speaker Abdulhadi Majali will easily win the position, he faces what some would call a quixotic challenge from second term parliamentarian Falak Jamani, the only woman in the new parliament who was elected without the help of the quota (Ref A).

[1](#)4. (C) A member of the previous parliament organized an informal meeting for new members to launch her campaign. She recognizes that she faces a formidable foe in Majali. Elected with an overwhelming majority of his Karak constituency, Majali has a core group of supporters and is a

well-known political operative within the parliament. "It's always the same speaker - Majali, Majali, Majali," Jamani complains. "It's time to change the routine." Majali has faced tough competition for the speakership before, and has even lost it for short periods. Yet throughout the past two parliaments (since 1999), Majali has served as speaker for the vast majority of the time.

¶5. (C) Since the elections on November 20, Jamani has been calling newly elected members of the parliament to ask them for support. In essence, she is trying to beat Majali at his own game of aligning tribal representatives behind his leadership. She repeatedly emphasized to poloff her Bedouin roots and tribal connections - a key part of her qualifications in the eyes of fellow politicians. Time is definitely a factor in her calculations - she is trying to get a foot in the door before the new members form any solid connections or ideas that would lure them to Majali. She is not courting representatives of the Islamic Action Front (IAF), although she thinks that they may be ready for a change in the speakership. (Majali is unabashedly anti-IAF.)

¶6. (C) Jamani is determined to break the hold of the tribal conservatives in parliament, and sees her effort as an attempt to create a bloc that is broadly progressive. In her view, the elections demonstrated that voters are keen on change, and expect movement on the economy in particular (Ref C). Jamani worries that the re-election of Majali would represent a return to the underperformance of the previous parliament. She is trying to work against rumors and back room deals that could easily derail her candidacy, as well as her opponent's proven track record of delivering influence and connections to parliamentarians who accept his leadership. Jamani is attempting to convince new

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parliamentarians that change is more important than delivery of services to a tribal base - an uphill battle for sure (Ref B).

Blocs, Political Parties, Interest Groups

¶7. (C) While Jamani's current efforts are specifically aimed at the speakership, she is toying with forming a parliamentary bloc or even a political party. What remains uncertain in her mind (and the minds of many observers) is how the scattered independents would coalesce around a single leader, political philosophy, or interest. The previous parliament was widely seen as driven primarily by the members' personal interests and the pursuit of perks for themselves and patronage for their constituents. In this environment, bringing together disparate members who have little stomach for national policy (ref D) is akin to herding cats.

¶8. (C) Influential parliament member and former Mayor of Amman Mamdouh Abbadi describes his new colleagues as "not parliamentarians, only rich people," and expects that the more experienced members of parliament (such as himself) will effectively control the body on their behalf for the next two years. While he admits that blocs form in parliament for the purposes of electing a speaker and assigning committees, Abbadi characterized the legislature as rather ad hoc in terms of political loyalties. He insisted that there are very few back room deals, and that independent parliamentarians quickly line up behind legislation that the government promotes on most issues.

¶9. (C) In the absence of organized political groupings, five members of the fifteenth parliament are well-known players of undoubted influence:

The Tribal Conservatives

Abdulhadi Majali

¶10. (C) Long-time speaker of the parliament, Majali is likely to be re-elected to that position. He has faced some opposition in the past, but all indications are that he is a safe bet for the speakership this year.

¶11. (C) Born in Karak in 1934, Majali holds a BSc in civil engineering from Baghdad University. He served for nearly twenty years in the Army's engineering corps before being appointed as Army Chief of Staff in 1976. He later served as Jordan's Ambassador to the United States (1981-1985) and director of the Public Security Directorate (1985-1989). After retiring from government service, Majali served briefly as director general of the Middle East Establishment for Strategic Studies before turning to politics. After forming a personality-based political party, Majali was elected to the parliament in 1993. He was then appointed Minister of Public Works in 1996. After a failed attempt to create a broader, pro-government conservative party, Majali was re-elected to the parliament in 1997, becoming speaker in ¶1999. He has begun in recent months laying the groundwork for a new political party - the National Partisan Trend - but it is too early to see what kind of traction it might gain.

Abdul Ra'uf Al-Rawabdeh

¶12. (SBU) Born in Irbid in 1939, Rawabdeh has a BSc in Pharmacology from the American University of Beirut. He was appointed Minister of Communications in 1976, later moving to the National Consultative Council for a five year stint (1978-1983). He then served as Chairman of the Jordan Phosphates and Mining Company before becoming Mayor of Amman from 1987 to 1989. Upon the re-instatement of parliamentary functions in Jordan in 1989, Rawabdeh was elected as a representative from Irbid. He was soon elevated to the post of Minister of Public Works. In the mid-1990s, he was Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Minister of State for Prime Ministry Affairs, finally landing in the Prime Ministry from 1999 to 2001. After serving as Prime Minister, Rawabdeh went to the Senate, where he stayed until 2003, when he was re-elected to the parliament once again..

Abdul Karim Al-Dughmi

¶13. (SBU) Born in Mafrag in 1955, Dughmi has a BA in law from Arab University of Beirut. He was a lawyer until being elected to the parliament in 1989, where he has been ever since. He then served as Minister of Rural and Municipal Affairs, Minister of Labor, Minister of Prime Ministry Affairs, and Minister of Justice in various governments

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through the mid-1990s.

The Progressives

Sa'ad Al-Surour

¶14. (SBU) Born in Mafrag in 1947, Surour has a BA in civil engineering from Riyadh University. He worked in the Amman Municipality and with various firms in Saudi Arabia until joining the National Consultative Council in 1982. He was elected to the parliament in 1989, and served as Minister of Water and Irrigation as well as Minister of Public Works and Housing. He was the speaker of the parliament from 1993 to 1997 and in 2003.

Mamdouh Abbadi

¶15. (SBU) Born in Amman in 1943, Abbadi has a BA in Medicine from Istanbul University and a medical degree in opthamology from a British university. He worked for the Ministry of Health for ten years, and served as the president of the Jordanian Medical Association from 1987 to 1991 until

becoming Minister of Health in that same year. He later became the Mayor of Amman until resigning from that post in 1998. Abbadi was first elected to the parliament in 2003, and won his seat in 2007 with over 20,000 votes. Abbadi is known for his leftist, pan-Arab views, and describes himself as a "socialist."

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